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ABSTRACT

The family communication course at Arapahoe Community College attempts to acquaint students with the central role of communication in the maintenance and enhancement of family relationships and to equip them with knowledge that can produce a greater flexibility in their communication within their own family units. The course is built around two basic human processes: the process of discovering meaning or identity and the process of establishing relatedness or connectedness with others. Two texts are used, along with instructor-prepared handouts. The major course assignment requires students to write a description of an interaction within their own families; the papers, with identifying information removed, are then given to other students, who write analyses of the interactions described. Finally, students write analyses of their own family interactions. The course has helped the instructor as well as the students to improve family communication skills. (A course syllabus is included.) (GT)

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FAMILY COMMUNICATION: INSIDENESS AND OUTSIDENESS

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We are born into a family, we are socialized and enculturated within a family, we mature from a family, we create a family using information and behaviors learned from a family, and, when we die, we diminish a family. Families surround us, shape us, contribute to our destiny.

The learning about families that one gathers is through the mode of communication. For this reason, Family Communication, as a course, is fertile ground for the Speech Communication discipline. We have within our course offerings Group Communication, within which Family Communication serves as our most fundamental model and example. Interpersonal Communication is offered at many schools as the required basic Speech Communication course. Families are the font where preferred interpersonal patterns and behaviors are learned. And, finally, for us who are caught up in the accountability challenge, and are meeting it by offering courses that meet the canons of practicablility, the Family Communication course increases the student's repertoire of life-time skills and behaviors.

Family Communication is a course that, at the theoretical level, attempts to acquaint the students with the central role of communication for maintenance and enhancement of family relationship. This is accomplished through reading texts and discussing varied scholarly approaches. Practically, a primary purpose is to equip the student with knowledge that can produce a greater flexibility in his/her

communication within his/her own family unit. It is for the former reason, that the Family Communication course has had great success at the community college level. The average age of the community college student is 27. This implies that many of the class members are in the process of creating a family or, in this flexible age, of disengaging from one family, meeting the pain, and searching, hopefully, for new family members to fill the vacancies. It is at their moments of crisis that they enroll in the Family Communication course, knowing their inadequacies and searching for alternatives. It is the chore of the teacher to find knowledge and acceptable methodologies to satisfy the hungry student and increase the student's repertoire of lifetime skills and behaviors.

The Family Communication course is difficult to write about for it is not an entity but an evolving process. The course is not static because as students leave, their feedback helps create the next course; as students enter, their expectations help to shape the current course, and, finally, as the instructor matures in his/her chosen philosophical approach, the course fluidly adapts to this growth. There are no texts specifically written about family communications by a member of our discipline. Therefore, all assignments have to be translated and rotated so that communication becomes the dominant variable. The burden for assigning, interpreting and evaluating the cognitive portion of the class is the delight and responsibility of the instructor.

Several articles have been published that guide the instructor, but the definition and direction of the course becomes individualistic dependent upon the instructor's philosophical understanding of Family Communication. (1,2)

This paper, then, will describe my approach and understanding of the course as I teach it. It will also include the projected outcomes and benefits for the student, some salient critical assignments and, finally, in keeping with the subjective tone of this paper, the benefits for the instructor.

The course is built around two basic human processes. The process of meaning or identity and the process of relatedness or connectedness. For the question "Who am I?" is one individuals struggle with for their entire lifetime. The tentative dynamic response is found in our interactional relationship with others. Various writers in family dynamics have labeled these processes in different ways. Hess and Handel (3) talk about "separateness and connectedness", Minuchin (4) writes about "separateness and belongingness", Kantor and Lehr (5) label these processes collectively as "distance-regulation communication" and Laing (6) writes about rules and meta-rules to ensure and enforce these emergent forces. The communication then focuses on these two processes and cognitively examines their emergence and evolution vis-a-vis the communication that is "normally" present within a family. Experientially, the two processes are played with, manipulated and exaggerated and displayed, so that students can further discover their identity, and expand their communication repetoire through relating with peers

in a safe classroom atmosphere.

The process of making meaning is omnipresent in one's development. The child's question, "Am I a boy or girl?" initiates the child's conception of his/her sexuality, the grade schooler's strong comparative expressions with his/her sibs is also an act of establishing identity. The adolescent struggling in the family with the tension between independency and dependency (with the usual over expression of counter-dependency) is actually filling in gaps in his/her identity process. On through one's life cycle, the question of "Who am I?" is asked and answered. One's satisfaction with the answer dwells in one's increasing capacity to form satisfying relationships that will afford the individual intimacy and dialogue in their fullest extent. It is within the family that meaningful communication patterns have their genesis and perpetuation.

The course uses, as a main text, Virginia Satir's Peoplemaking (7). It is a relatively easy book to read and includes family exercises that allow the student to experience various communication postures with his/her family in situ, as well as to practice these skills in class. The second text is Scenes from a Marriage by Ingmar Bergman (8). This was chosen for its realistic approach to dialogue, and dramatic representation of the two focal processes in conflict and final integration. Because neither of these texts is complete, instructor prepared handouts are also used. These are summaries of authority's positions and findings and collated according to specific

family dynamics.

The course begins with a two-week section devoted to an explanation and demonstration of the meta-model developed by Bandler and Grinder (9). The purpose is to expand the student's skills to become more adept at getting information in a non-threatening way, and to increase their empathic ability by not imposing their values on the responses they elicit. It is also beneficial to the students, who like the national student profile, are deficient in grammatical concepts. By practising the Bandler and Grinder method, the students can apply these easily understood linguistic principles to other areas of study.

The major assignment is difficult for the students to approach, yet, after completion, it has been rated as a highly beneficial critical endeavor. Each student writes a two page dialogue-description of his/her family using a mundane event. Kantor and Lehr (5,ix) state that "we shall understand families when we understand how they manage the commonplace." Some events used have been conversation at the dinner table, bringing in the Sunday paper, preparing for Grandma's visit, or riding in the car for a Sunday outing. My advice to the students is to keep the event simple, the dialogue is rich enough. These descriptions are handed in at the end of the fourth week with the title on the first page, and the title and student's name on the cover page. The cover page is taken off after reading the paper, to maintain anonymity. The paper is then randomly given to another student for analysis. Several analytic methods are presented to the

student (5,p.150; 7,p.116;10,11) for his/her choice. At the end of the sixth week, the analyses are handed in for grading. The cover sheets of the analyses are removed, again for anonymity, and the original description is handed back to its author with the challenge of choosing a different analytic method than the one previously used. The student now analyzes his/her own family's interation. This is handed in at the end of the eighth week for evaluation. At the termination of the quarter, the student is handed a packet containing his/her original description, an anonymous analysis and the graded analysis of his/her described interation. The method used is complicated in its execution, but serves several useful functions. It allows each student to empathically enter another family's doman, a preserve usually out-of-bounds and guarded. In addition, it allows distance to accrue between the writing of the event, which has been reported as painful, and the "objective" analysis. Students reported that this assignment was highly useful. "Allows me to see the wide range of life-styles", "The best part of this class was the analyses I had to do", "I liked the papers the best. They were important", and "This course should be required for anyone in the people-business; LEAA, Special Education majors, and everyone in Allied Health", are some statements that were offered at the post-course feedback session.

One final area to be addressed is the beneficial aspects for the instructor who teaches Family Communication. Over the years, I have increased my knowledge in the area, increased my library, and increased my skills through attending workshops, seminars,

and classes. I have met excited searching students. I have seen women enter the door at the beginning of the quarter with a self-concept that included the component of powerlessness, and exit at the end of the quarter with skills, knowledge and training that increased their self-esteem. They have approached the dissolution of their unrealistic feelings of inferiority, and increased their determination to actively involve themselves with their situation as a full participant. I have witnessed two divorced men, each with custody of a child, explore their situations delicately, yet desperately. Eventually, they negotiated a common residence where babysitting and housekeeping chores are shared. And, most importantly to me, as a mother of four teenagers, I am constantly learning with my students, how to cope with our familial collective relatedness, and searching for information about my identity.

Footnotes

1. Goldberg, J.H. & Goldberg, A.A. "Family Communication," Journal of Western Speech Communication Association, vol XL, no. 2, pp 104-110.

2. Bochner, A.P., "Conceptual Frontiers in the Study of Communication in Families: An Introduction to the Literature." Human Communication Research, vol. no. pp. 381-397.

3. Handel, G., "Psychological Study of Whole Families," Psychological Bulletin, vol 63, 1965, pp 19-41.

4. Minuchin, S., Families and Family Therapy, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974.

5. Kantor, D. & Lehr, W., Inside the Family. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 1975.

6. Laing, R.D., The Politics of the Family. New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1969.

7. Satir, V., Peoplemaking. Palo Alto, CA: Science & Behavior Books, 1972.

8. Bergman, I., Scenes From A Marriage. New York, N.Y.: Panther Books, 1974.

9. Bandler, R. & Grinder, J., The Structure of Magic. Palo Alto CA: 1975.

10. Sieburg, E., "Categories of Families" unpublished.

11. Goldberg, J.H., "Rules in the Family" unpublished.

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FAMILY COMMUNICATION
Communication 136

Texts: Peoplemaking, Virginia Satir, Science and Behavior Books
Scenes From A Marriage, Bergman, Bantam Books

Course Description:
A discussion-lecture course in which students can explore together the dynamics of family communication. Some of the variables we will discuss are the family as a communication system, the subsystems of a family, the family as a rule-governed interaction system; family's space, time, energy; power in the family; and affect and meaning in the family. Methodologies to be used to accomplish this task will be lectures, films, VTR's, discussion, case studies, role playing and class member presentations.

Student Responsibilities:

1. Because the class format is student centered, your presense is needed and required. Excessive absences will adversely affect your grade.
2. One major paper is required. It should include a description of a family's interaction processes. (Approximately three typewritten pages.) It could be your own, either by origin or by creation, or it could be a description of a family in any of the following books: Pathways of Madness, Jules Henry; A Mingled Yarn, Beulah Parker; Searching for Caleb, Anne Tyler; To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee; In This Sign, Joanne Greenberg; The Glass Menagerie, Tennessee Williams; or Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Edward Albee. All the preceding books are on three-day reserve in the ACC library. This portion of the paper will be handed in at the end of the fourth week. The paper will be given to someone in the class who will then analyze the family according to one of several variables and/or models presented by the instructor. (Approximately three typewritten pages.) At the end of the sixth week this analysis will be turned in for a grade, at which time the author of the family description will receive the original paper he/she wrote for his/her own analysis. At the end of the quarter, the description and the two analyses will be returned to the author of the description. Family descriptions should have a title on the first page and a title and your name on a removable title page. In this way, we can preserve anonymity.
3. Each student will hand in a two-page typewritten research paper explicating some aspect of family communication.
4. Each student will be in an extended family role-play simulation.

Course Objectives:

1. To gain insight into the dynamics of the communication of the nuclear family.
2. To practice the skill necessary for a healthy family member, with emphasis on functional communication.
3. To experience the many modes of relating within the family.
4. To learn to use the Bandler and Grinder meta-model of communication.

Grading Criteria:

Topic Paper----------20%
FamilyAnalysis I----------20%
Family Analysis II----------20%
Exam on Meta-Model----------20%
Class Attitude and Contribution-----20%

One	Introduction, definition of a family, speech communication and family communication	Satir, Chapters 1,2,3
Two	Communication model	
Three	Communication model	exam on meta-model
Four	Systems theory - family subsystems - VTR of a family	Satir, Chapters 8,9,10 Family description due
Five	Who talks to whom - networks - Satir theory - Satir film	Satir, Chapters 3,4,5,6
Six	When and in whay way - modes of relating ways to analyze a family	Satir, Chapters 11,12,16 Analysis I due
Seven	Rules and power within the family	Satir, Chapters 7,13,4,15
Eight	Individuals in the family familial communication role	Satir, Chapters 17,18
Nine	Marital communication	Bergman, all Analysis II due
Ten	Integration of the course material	